

Who Cares about the Environment in 2006?



At a glance

Who cares about the Environment in

Headlines

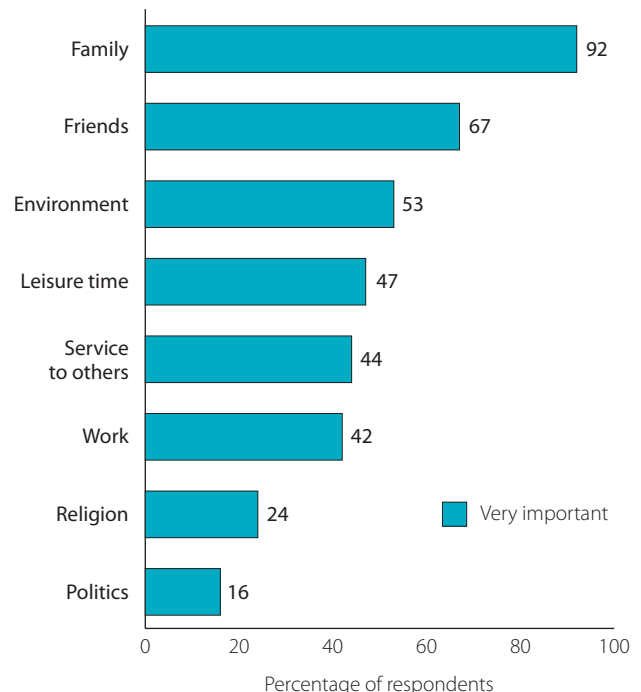
- People value the environment highly as part of their lives and almost 90% are concerned about environmental problems.
- Water related issues are the top environmental issues for the people of NSW in 2006, nominated by almost 3 times more people than any other issue.
- Climate change and energy issues are growing rapidly in importance.
- Environmental knowledge and understanding has grown markedly since the first survey in 1994.
- Most people are taking a range of actions to contribute to the protection and improvement of the environment – 71% say they often do at least five out of ten things asked in the survey.
- There is strong support for government action and regulation to protect and improve the environment.

Background

- 'Who Cares about the Environment?' is social research conducted every three years since 1994.
- It measures environmental knowledge, views, attitude and behaviour of people across NSW.
- In 2006, the research included a survey with a representative cross-section of 1,724 NSW residents aged 15 or over, a follow-up survey on specific issues with 1,011 of the same people and focus group discussions with groups of people identified by their level of interest in the environment.

The environment is very important to people

People value the environment as part of their lives. 93% say it is important or very important. Environment ranks third after family and friends.



People are concerned about environmental problems

87% of people say they are concerned about environmental problems, with 34% saying they are concerned a great deal. The major reason for concern is future generations.

Concern for future generations	35%
Quality of life	18%
Maintaining ecosystems	15%
Health effects of pollution	11%
Long-term economic sustainability	10%
Availability of resources we consume	9%
Other	1%

2006? At a glance

Knowledge is increasing

- The number of people who know that the greenhouse effect is not caused by a hole in the ozone layer has increased from 24% in 1994 to 41% in 2006.
- The number of people who know that more mammals have become extinct in Australia in recorded history than in any other country has increased from 29% in 1994 to 51% in 2006.
- A very wide range of issues are now nominated as environmental issues as understanding of complex issues increases.
- Many people discuss specific solutions to problems when asked about environmental initiatives to protect the environment, including about half of those nominating water and energy/climate change issues.
- The committed or environmentally strong segment (about one-fifth) of the population has a good understanding of complex environmental concepts such as sustainability and biodiversity.

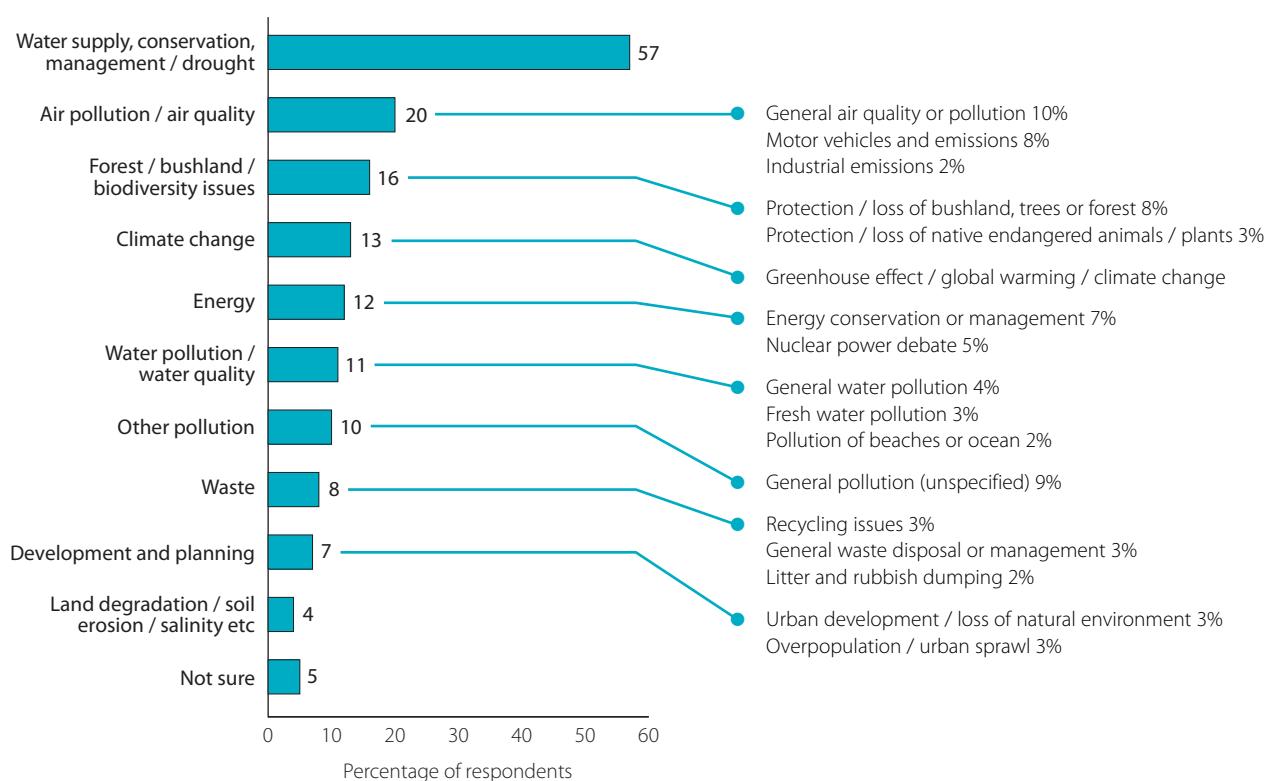
But we still have a long way to go

- A majority of people still cannot correctly distinguish between the issues of the greenhouse effect and the hole in the ozone layer.
- Only one-third of people (33%) know that much more water in NSW is used for agriculture than for domestic and manufacturing uses combined.
- Only slightly over one-third of people (35%) know that recycling paper, cardboard, and glass saves water, energy and fuel as well as resources.
- Young people (15-24s) are much less likely to say they often do a range of environmentally friendly things, including reducing water and energy use, avoiding products with excess packaging and re-using something instead of throwing it away.
- More people of non-English speaking background say they don't know whether the situation in NSW is getting better or worse on a range of environmental indicators.

What are the most important environmental issues?

People were asked what the **two** most important environmental issues are in NSW today.

Water (including supply, conservation, management and drought) emerged as the leading environmental issue, with climate change (primarily the greenhouse effect and global warming) increasing sharply in priority compared with previous surveys.





We all need to do more to protect the environment

People were asked whether different groups are doing enough to protect the environment.

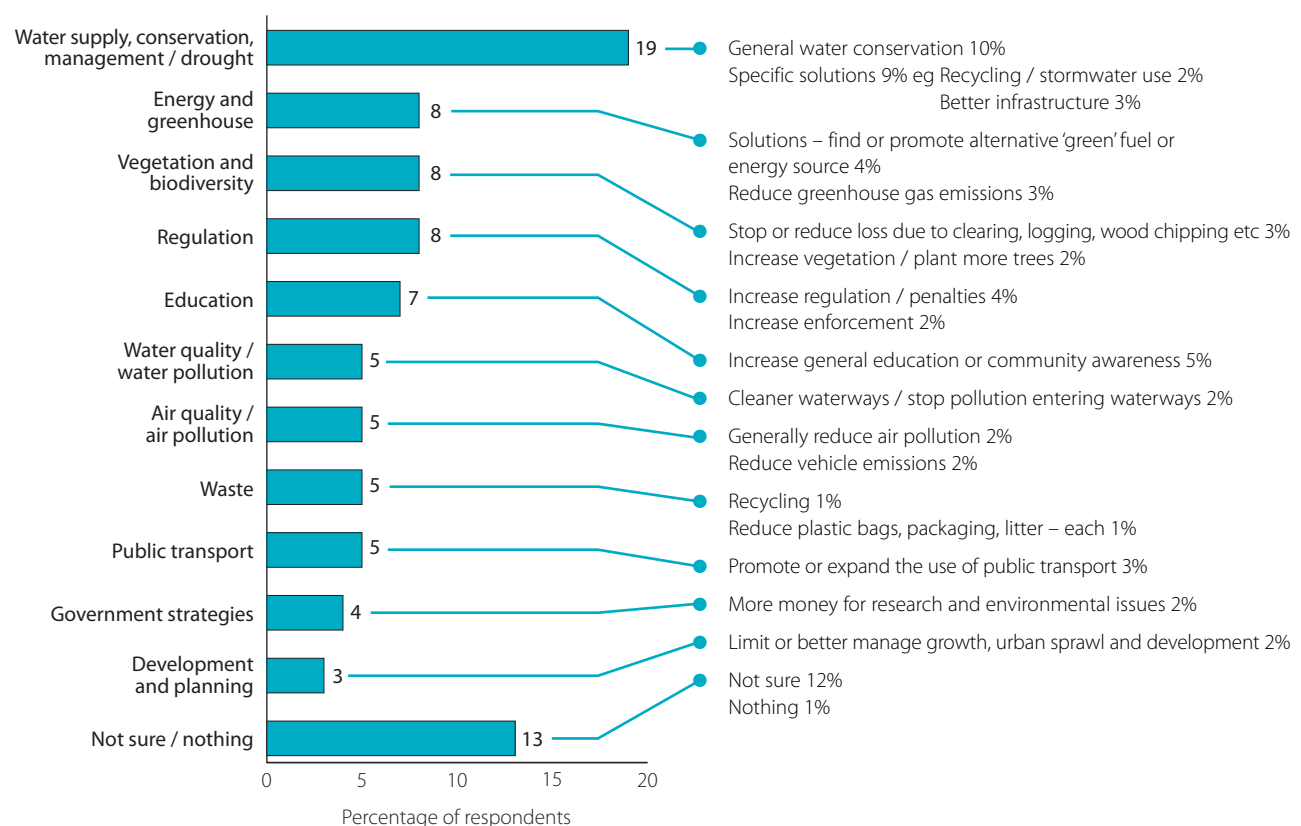
Sector	% think doing enough	% think need to do more
Community environment groups and organisations	55	40
Farmers	42	52
Local councils	27	71
Retailers	26	66
State Government	17	81
Manufacturing industry	16	77
Individuals	16	81
Commonwealth Government	15	80

How do people feel about regulation?

- **96%** of people in NSW believe that the aim of environmental regulations should be to improve rather than merely maintain the health of the environment.
- **68%** disagree with the proposition that environmental regulation is restricting or holding back the NSW economy.
- **77%** reject the idea that a lower level of environmental regulation is required in NSW.
- The number of people who think environmental regulation is too lax has decreased since 2003 for most sectors except forestry.

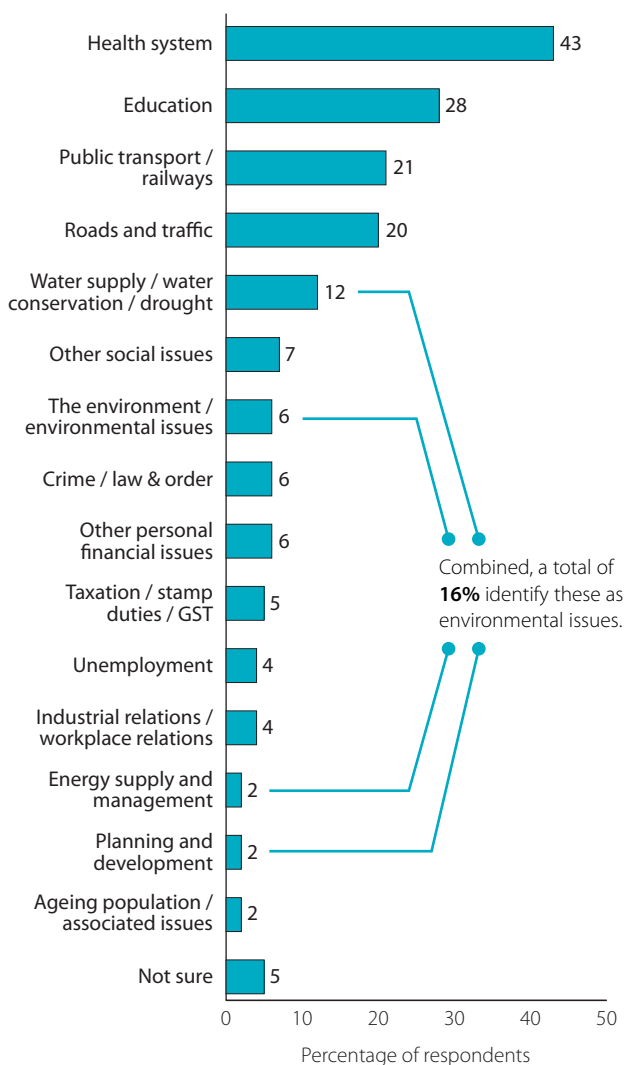
What should the government be doing to protect the environment?

People were asked what they think is the single most important thing the NSW Government can do to protect the environment. Water (supply, conservation, management and drought) is nominated by the most people.



Priority issues for the NSW Government now

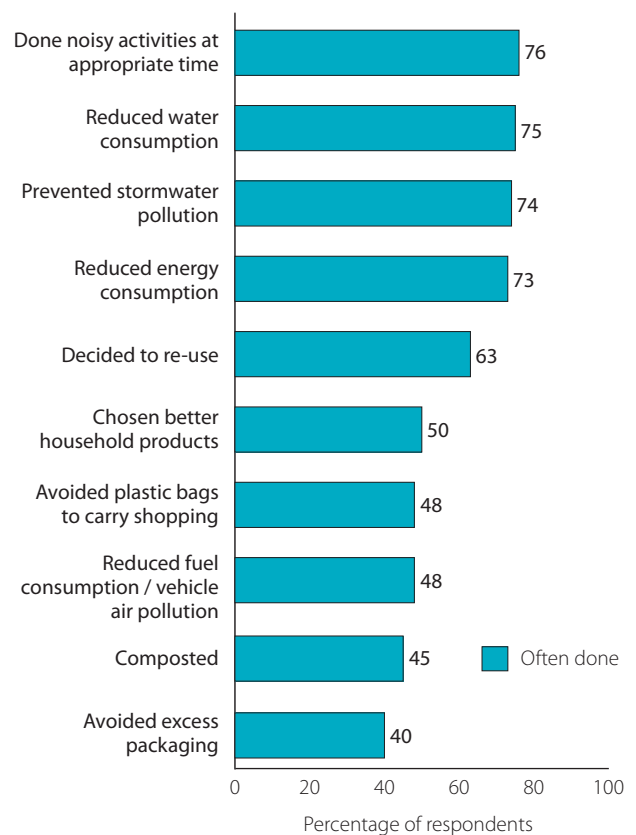
Compared to other issues, the environment ranked seventh as a current priority and water conservation issues ranked fifth. However, 16% nominated issues which they clearly identified as environmental issues either here or elsewhere in the survey.



People were also asked what they thought would be priorities for the NSW Government in ten years time. Water issues were third after health and education as a future issue. More people thought water, energy, environment and planning/development would be priorities in the future compared to now and a total of 24% nominated issues identified as environmental.

What have people done in the last 12 months?

About three in four NSW residents have regularly reduced water and electricity consumption, avoided stormwater pollution and confined noisy activities to an appropriate time in the last year.



What prompts people to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours?

Different things for different people and different issues!

For example, the top motivator for:

- Saving energy and fuel, is cost or saving money
- Composting, is that it is good for the garden
- Avoiding excess packaging or environmentally damaging products, is education or knowledge and awareness
- Avoiding plastic bags, is education and availability of 'green' bags.

There's more in the full report

- People in different parts of NSW have different views on the two most important environmental issues for action by the NSW Government:
 - those in rural areas more often say water conservation/drought and forests, bushland and biodiversity issues
 - Sydney residents – water conservation and air quality or pollution
 - residents of small country towns – water quality or pollution
- Women are more likely than men to say they often do environmentally friendly things around the home or in shopping.
- The number of environmentally friendly behaviours people say they are doing increases markedly with age, with over 35s much more likely to be often doing nine out of the ten things asked about in the survey than under 35s.
- Six in ten people say they have visited a national park in the last year and four in ten have visited a botanic garden.
- **65%** of people in NSW think there has been progress in reducing water consumption and **55%** think there has been progress in improving the cleanliness of beaches and the ocean.
- **79%** of people believe that the future health of the environment of NSW will decline moderately or seriously if we continue to live as we currently do now.
- **81%** agree or strongly agree that money should be spent on education campaigns about solutions to global warming.
- **55%** agree or strongly agree that households should pay for the amount (weight or volume) of waste they produce.
- **68%** think chemicals in everyday products are having a harmful effect on the environment but less than half think they are having a harmful effect on the health of the community or the health of their family.

Explored in depth

Focus group discussions were held with people grouped on the basis of their level of environmental interest, knowledge and behaviours.



For the first time in *Who Cares?* you can find out in-depth information about different parts of the community – their quite different perceptions of the environment, environmental damage and its consequences, understanding of environmental concepts such as sustainability, and commitment to behaviours and activities to protect the environment.

See the main report for this new analysis.

More details

Who Cares about the Environment in 2006?:

- contains the results of two telephone surveys with people from Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong/Illawarra, large and small country towns and other rural areas, with core questions to provide comparisons with past surveys, and some new questions on current issues.
- also includes findings from focus group discussions about people's views of the environment and their own environmental activities.
- provides links to complete results, including full demographic analysis of answers to all questions by age, sex, residential location, education level, whether of non English speaking background, and whether the respondent has children.

Who Cares about the Environment in 2006? is available from the Department of Environment and Conservation on 131 555 and online at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/whocares/. Printed copies of the 1997, 2000 and 2003 reports are also available, and the 2000 and 2003 reports are online.